

soul of America is found in caring and loving communities like Davenport, Iowa.

All these choices make this one of the most important elections in our history. The security and prosperity of our country, the health and education for our families, the retirement of our seniors, and the direction of our culture are all at stake. And the decision is in the best of hands; it's in the hands of the American people.

I see a great day coming for America. One of my favorite quotes was written by a fellow Texan named Tom Lea. He said, "Sarah and I live on the east side of the mountain. It's the sunrise side, not the sunset side. It is the side to see the day that is coming, not to see the day that has gone." My opponent has spent much of this campaign talking about the day that has gone. I'm talking about the day that's coming.

You know, we have been through a lot together over the past years. Because we've done the hard work of climbing the mountain, we can see the valley below. We'll protect our families. We'll build on their prosperity. We'll defend our Nation's deep-

est values. We'll spread freedom in the world, and as we do, we'll achieve the peace we all long for.

When I traveled your State in 2000, asking for the vote, first in the caucuses and then in the general election, I made this pledge: I pledged that I would uphold the honor and the integrity of the office to which I had been elected. With your help, I will do so for 4 more years.

God bless. Thanks for coming. Thank you all. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:30 p.m. at the RiverCenter. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who made the keynote address at the 2004 Republican National Convention; former Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani of New York City, and his wife, Judith; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; and Gen. Tommy R. Franks, USA (Ret.), former combatant commander, U.S. Central Command. He also referred to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (9/11 Commission).

Remarks in Onalaska, Wisconsin October 26, 2004

The President. Thank you all. What a great way to spend a Tuesday, and that's to be on a bus traveling throughout the great State of Wisconsin. Thank you all for coming out to say hello. It's such an honor to be here. Laura and I are—our spirits are lifted up because so many have come out to say hello. We're honored you are here. I'm here to ask for your vote. I'm here to ask for your help. There's no doubt in my mind, if we turn out our vote in Wisconsin, we'll win a great victory on November the 2d.

I don't know if you know the history of me and Laura. We were in the seventh

grade together in San Jacinto Junior High in Midland, Texas, and then we became reacquainted years later when she was a public school librarian. And I asked her to marry me—I'm sure some of you can relate to this. She said, "Fine, but make me a promise." I said, "What is it?" "Well, promise me I'll never have to give a political speech." [Laughter] I said, "Okay, you've got a deal." [Laughter] Fortunately, she didn't hold me to that promise. She's giving a lot of speeches, and when she does the American people see a warm, compassionate, great First Lady. I have been traveling your State a lot, talking about the

reasons why I think people ought to put me back into office. But perhaps the most important one is so that Laura will be First Lady for 4 more years.

I am proud of my runningmate, Dick Cheney. In all due respect to those who are here who are follically challenged—[laughter]—I readily concede my runningmate does not have the waviest hair in the race. You'll be pleased to know I did not pick him because of his hairdo. [Laughter] I picked him because of his experience and his judgment and his ability to get the job done.

And I'm proud of your friend Tommy Thompson. He has done a great job. I gave him one of the toughest jobs in Washington, DC, and he has responded. He has done a fabulous job to help those who hurt. Just take the issue of Medicare. Tommy and I went to Washington to solve problems, not to pass them on to future Presidents and future generations. That's our job, to tackle the tough problems. Medicare was a problem. See, Medicare hadn't changed, but medicine had. For example, they pay nearly \$100,000 for heart surgery, but not one dime for the prescription drugs that could prevent the heart surgery from being needed in the first place. Tommy recognized that wasn't fair. I recognized it wasn't fair. We brought Republicans and Democrats together. We did what other Presidents and other Secretaries couldn't do: We modernized Medicare, and starting in 2006, our seniors will get prescription drug coverage.

Let me say one other thing to our seniors here in Wisconsin. You might remember the 2000 campaign, when they ran those ads that said, "If George W. gets elected, our seniors are not going to get their Social Security checks." Remember those? Yes. Well, I want you—as you're gathering up the vote, remind your friends and neighbors that George W. did get elected and our seniors did get their Social Security check. And our seniors will continue to get their Social Security checks. But we're also

going to strengthen Social Security for our younger generation. Our youngsters ought to be allowed to take some of their payroll taxes and set up a personal savings account they call their own, an account the Government cannot take away.

I want to thank Congressman Mark Green, who is with us today. Congressman, I appreciate you coming. He's a fine, good, young Member of the House of Representatives. I want to thank the mayor of Onalaska with us today. Mr. Mayor, I'm proud you're here. Thanks for coming. Fill the potholes. [Laughter]

I'm proud to be standing with the next United States Senator from Wisconsin, Tim Michels. He married a lady named Barbara. [Laughter] I know some Barbaras. [Laughter] One of them is still telling me what to do. [Laughter] And I'm still listening, I want you to know.

I'm very impressed by a candidate for Wisconsin's Third Congressional District, a man I hope you support, the next congressman, Dale Schultz.

I want to thank the grassroots activists who are here, the people who are putting up the signs, making the phone calls, the people who helped turn out such a huge crowd here. I'm honored to have your support. Now is the time to keep the work up. Now is the time to find every single voter and tell them we have a duty, a duty in this country to vote. When you get them headed to the polls, remind them if they want a safer America, a stronger America, and a better America, to put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. We're only one week away from the vote, and I'm focusing on the big issues that are facing our country's families. This election comes down to five clear choices for our families: your family's security; your family's budget; your quality of life; your retirement; and the bedrock values that are so critical to our country's future.

First and foremost, I've talked about the quality retirement. When I'm talking about Medicare and making sure it exists and strong, that helps our families. When I'm talking about Social Security and making sure it's around today as well as around tomorrow, that helps our families.

But the first, biggest concern of any President is your security. Our Nation is at war against a terrorist enemy unlike any we have faced before. The most solemn duty of the American President is to protect the American people. We will be relentless, determined, steadfast, and strong. We will not relent. We will stay on the offensive until the fight is won.

Another big issue, of course, is our economy. It affects the quality of life. It affects your budget. It affects how much money you have in your wallet. We will expand and strengthen our economic recovery to make sure opportunity spreads throughout every corner of this country. This campaign offers a clear choice when it comes to the economy and our vision for how to create jobs. My policies support and strengthen the small businesses, which are creating most new jobs in America.

I'm going to spend a little time talking about the vision of enhancing the entrepreneurial spirit. My opponent promises to raise your taxes.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. And unfortunately for our small-business owners, that's a promise most politicians tend to keep. [*Laughter*]

Our economy has been through a lot. When you're out there rounding up the vote, I want you to remind people that 6 months prior to my arrival, the stock market was in serious decline. Our economy was declining in the last half of the year 2000. We fell into a recession. We had corporate scandals which affected our economy. By the way, we passed tough laws. We have made it abundantly clear, we will not tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of America.

We were attacked. And those attacks cost us about a million jobs in the 3 months after September the 11th. But, see, I understand something. I understand the engine of growth that this economy has found with the entrepreneurs and workers of America. And that's why we passed the largest tax relief in a generation, tax relief which encouraged consumption and investment.

And it's working. The economic stimulus plan we passed is working. This country created about 1.9 million jobs in the last 13 months. The national unemployment rate is down to 5.4 percent. And let me remind you of where that stands: That's lower than the average rate of the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s. The unemployment rate in Wisconsin is down to 5 percent. That is down almost a full point since the summer of 2003. We're headed in the right direction in America.

Our farmers are doing well. Farm income is up, and that's good for our economy. The homeownership rate is at an all-time high in America. We're on the move. We're going forward, and we're not going to go back to the days of tax and spend.

This is a time of fantastic opportunity. The job of Government is to create an environment in which the entrepreneurial spirit can flourish, in which people are willing to work hard to realize their dreams. Government doesn't create wealth. Government creates the environment that says, "Take a risk. Start a business if you choose to. Own something."

Today Joan Shelley is with us. I want you to hear her story. Joan is right there. First of all, she is a mom. She and her husband have got eight children. Listen to her story. She didn't think she was spending enough time—she worked as a nurse—didn't spend enough time at home. First of all, she's got her priorities straight. If you are fortunate enough to be a mom or a dad, your most important responsibility is to love your child with all your heart and all your soul.

So guess what happened? Six years ago, she decided to start an online business selling cabinet hardware from the basement of her home. How many times have you heard that story? You know, "I sat around the kitchen table and came up with an idea and started a business." "I started a business in my garage." She started hers in her basement. Today, KnobGallery employs 20 people, most of them moms who wanted more flexibility for their families. This administration believes in flex-time. The world has changed. Our labor laws ought to change with them. Moms and dads ought to be able to have the flex-time in the workplace so they can balance family and the need to work.

KnobGallery is a thriving, \$1.4 million business. Her family is working in the business: Kristina, it turns out, designs the company's web page. Joan is living the American Dream. She has started her own business. She owns her own company. And she—I said, "Are you going to increase the jobs?" She said, "I'm intending to add more people to work." See, the more Joans that start up their own business, the more likely that somebody is going to find a job in America. The role of the Government is to create an environment for the Joan Shelleys to feel comfortable in starting and expanding their business.

Ric Hartman is with us. There he is. Hi, Ric. He managed at one time the in-house design shop of a large packaging firm for 15 years. Last October, about a year ago, he learned the company was going to close his operation. So guess what he did? He got some of those people he worked with, put them in a van, went to a local flour mill and said, "This is where we're going to start our new company." See, the entrepreneurial spirit must be strong if America is going to be a hopeful place. Five came with him. Today, he runs a profitable small business called Hartman Design. Here's what he said: "Deep down, I think every design person wants to run their own shop." Deep down, a lot of peo-

ple in America want to run their own shop. Deep down, people have a desire to start their own business, and when they do, somebody is more likely to find a job.

A hopeful America and one that's good for your budget is one in which small businesses are thriving, in which people from all walks of life feel comfortable about starting their own business. Do you realize minority businesses are up in America? That is hopeful and positive for the future of this country. Seven out of ten new jobs in America are created by small businesses. And there is a source of upward mobility in America that comes with ownership. When a woman owns her own business, she's upwardly mobile. When a Latino or an African American starts his or her own business, they become upwardly mobile. Ownership is a powerful part of the American Dream.

And so the fundamental question in this campaign, who's got the best strategy to make sure the entrepreneurial spirit is strong? Who's got the idea, who understands, and who can best make sure that more small businesses grow in America? First, in order to make sure the entrepreneurial spirit is strong, America must be the best place in the world to do business. If you want businesses to start, this must be the best place in the world to do business. And secondly, to make sure this is a hopeful world, we've got to make sure the workforce is the best trained in the world. A lot of good jobs and a lot of good hopes start with good education.

First, let me talk about how to make sure this is the best place in the world to do business. One, we've got to keep your taxes low. We passed good tax relief. We raised the child credit. That helps if you're a mom or a dad. We reduced the marriage penalty. I believe strongly the Tax Code ought to encourage marriage, not penalize marriage. We created a 10 percent bracket. That helps the working families. But we also said, "If you pay taxes, you ought to get relief." If you're going to have

tax relief, everybody who pays taxes ought to get relief. That's only fair.

But guess what happens? What most Americans don't know, and evidently what my opponent doesn't know, is that most small businesses are either a Subchapter S corporation like the two small businesses I just mentioned or sole proprietorships, which means you pay tax at the individual income-tax rate. Ninety percent of businesses in America pay individual income taxes, which says when you cut the taxes on everybody who pays taxes, you're helping the small businesses. See, there is a connection between good tax relief and growth in the small-business sector.

And so to encourage small-business investment, not only did we say, "You can have more money in your coffers so you can expand your business or pay more money or better afford health care," but we encouraged investment by increasing the small-business expensing deduction from \$25,000 to \$100,000. See, I understand if you create the demand for goods and services and provide incentives for investment, the economy grows. That's what you've got to understand. It's a difference of opinion. It's a difference of philosophy. My opponent believes the economy grows by growing the size of the Federal Government. I believe the economy grows by growing the size of the coffers of small businesses.

Here's what Paul Schoeneck of New Berlin, Wisconsin, said. See, his business, like the other two, were Subchapter S corporations. He said about tax relief, "We have doubled our workforce. We've increased pay. We have consistently paid out bonuses. We've significantly increased our gross and net income. We've increased our production lines by nine, remodeled our offices, and significantly improved our infrastructure." That's what he said. Those aren't my words. That is what a small-business owner from Wisconsin has said about the tax relief. He said, "Without tax relief, this would not have been possible."

I want you, when you hear these people talking about tax relief, about how it only benefited certain people—this tax relief has helped our small businesses grow and prosper, and this economy is on the move because the entrepreneurial spirit is strong.

And taxes are an issue in this campaign. I'm running against a fellow who's promised \$2.2 trillion of new Federal spending. That's with a "T." That is—that's a lot even for a Senator from Massachusetts. [Laughter] So they said, "How are you going to pay for it?" He said, "Oh, we'll just tax the rich." That means raise the top two brackets. By raising the top two brackets, he's taxing the small-business sector of America. That's bad economic policy. Just as the economy is beginning to grow, just as the small businesses are feeling confident—I talked to the two small-business owners here. I said, "Are you going to hire somebody?" They said, "We're thinking about hiring new people." But running up the taxes on them would make it less likely they'd hire somebody. It's bad economic policy to tax the small-business owners of America, which is precisely what my opponent's plan would do.

See, when you say you're going to run up the top two brackets, you raise about \$600 billion, maybe 800 billion, depending on whose accountant you use. [Laughter] But the point is, in either case you're far short of the \$2.2 trillion that he has promised. There is a gap. There is a gap between what he's promised and what he can deliver. And guess who usually gets to fill the gap?

Audience members. We do!

The President. Yes, you do. But we're not going to let him tax you. We're going to win on November the 2d.

The bottom line about our economic visions is this: To pay for all his new spending he's proposed, my opponent will have to raise taxes not just on small-business owners but on everyone who's ever worked for a small business, shopped at a small business, or walked by a small business.

[Laughter] We're not going to let him tax you; we're going to win.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. To make sure that this economy is strong and the small businesses can flourish, we've got to do something about the frivolous and junk lawsuits. These kind of lawsuits cost our economy about \$230 billion a year. This amounts to about \$3,000 a year for the average family. They're expensive, and they're really expensive on small businesses. If part of the vision is to make sure the small-business sector of our economy flourishes, we've got to do something about the liability. The average cost of tort liability for a small business is about \$150,000. That's money that could be better used for employees, worker training, health care, expanding the business, creating new jobs.

My opponent and I have a different approach. He's sided with the personal-injury trial lawyers time and time again. They're powerful in Washington, make no mistake about it. It's hard to get good legal reform out of the United States Senate because they're influential. As a matter of fact, he's raised more money from lawyers than any other Member of the United States Senate. That's about \$22 million so far since 1989, and still counting. And there's a reason why. He's voted five times against protecting small businesses on punitive damages. He's made it clear where he stands. He's made it abundantly clear. He's put a personal-injury trial lawyer on the ticket.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Now, I'm going to stand with our small-business owners and continue to be for legal reforms in Washington, DC.

We need less regulations on our small businesses. We need reasonable regulations. I can't guarantee that anybody in Washington has ever read the forms small businesses have to fill out. I wish I could say they have; I doubt it. But one way to make sure we reduce the burden on our—not

only our small businesses but our—the working people here in America is to reform the Tax Code. It's a complicated mess. It is too complex. I'm going to bring people together. Listen, I recognize the—first of all, the code is a million pages long. American workers and small-business owners and families spend 6 billion hours a year filling out the forms. We can do a better job. We can make this Tax Code pro-growth, pro-family, and fair. And I will bring Republicans^{*} and Democrats together to do so.

A couple of other quick points on how to make sure the environment is good for business growth so that you've got more money, so that you can manage your budget better, so that people can find a job. We need—Congress needs to pass my energy plan. It's a plan that makes sense. It's common sense. It encourages conservation. It encourages the use of renewables like ethanol and biodiesel. It uses technologies to help us burn coal more cleanly. It encourages exploration for natural gas in environmentally friendly ways. To make sure that this environment for growth is strong, we need to be less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

Let me talk right quick about education, because I believe a good economy requires this workforce of ours to be educated. I think the two go hand in hand. I don't think you can have a hopeful environment for growth if our people aren't educated. It all starts with the younger kids. That's why I went to Washington, to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. You know, this business about just shuffling the children through, grade after grade, year after year, without learning the basics was not good enough for America, as far as I'm concerned. I believe every child can learn, and I believe every school must teach. And so we increased funding, particularly for Title I students. But we said, "In return for extra funding, show us

^{*} White House correction.

whether or not a child can read and write and add and subtract.”

See, I understand you can’t solve a problem until you diagnose a problem. You can’t fix a problem until you fully understand the nature of the problem. By measuring, we now know where the problems exist in America, and we’re providing the extra money to solve them. And guess what’s happening? Kids are learning to read and write and add and subtract. Because we’re measuring, we now know the benchmarks. We’re seeing progress. We’re closing the achievement gap amongst minority students in America. And we’re not going to go back to the old days of mediocrity and low standards.

I think one of the country’s greatest assets is the community college system. Community colleges are able to adjust their curriculum to meet the needs of the job providers. I’ve met small businesses who have told me about helping set up a curriculum in our community colleges so our workers can gain the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. You just heard about Joan’s company, where in her basement, she started a company over the Internet. In other words, we need new skill sets as this economy of ours changes. And a great place for America’s workers to gain new skill sets is in the community college system all across our country.

Most of the uninsured in America work for small businesses. Small businesses are having trouble affording health care. That’s why I believe small businesses ought to be allowed to pool risk to join together so they can buy insurance at the same discount that big companies are able to do.

We’ll expand health savings accounts to help our families and small businesses to be able to better afford health insurance and, at the same time, provide a health account that you can own and you can manage, you can take with you from job to job. And we’ll make sure we do something about these frivolous lawsuits that are running up the cost of health care. This

is a national issue. I have met too many ob-gyns who are being driven out of practice because the lawsuits are running up their cost of doing business, their premiums. And I’ve met too many patients of ob-gyns who are having to drive for miles, wondering whether or not they and their child will get the health care they need.

Medical liability is a crisis in America, and it’s a crisis because we can’t get anything done in the United States Senate because the trial bar is too strong. My opponent has voted against medical liability reform not once, not twice but 10 times. In a new term, I’m going to bring people together and say, “The people have spoke. We need medical liability reform now to make sure health care is affordable and available.”

We have a big difference when it comes to health care in this campaign. And it is a big difference. I remember that debate when my opponent stood up there with a straight face and he said, “The Government has nothing to do with it,”—“it” being his health care plan. I could barely contain myself. [*Laughter*] The Government has got a lot to do with it—a lot to do with it. Eight out of ten people would end up on the Government health care. Think about this: When you run up the Medicaid, make Medicaid more eligible for people, it’s going to provide an incentive for small businesses to not provide insurance for their employees because the Government will. That doesn’t make any sense, to be moving people from private insurance to the Government. When the Government writes the check, the Government starts setting the rules, and you don’t want the Federal Government making the rules when it comes to your health care.

I’ve come here to Wisconsin to tell the people I understand how this economy works, and my policies are standing square with the workers, the families, and the small-business owners of America. I also want to tell you in changing times, some

things do not change, the values we try to live by, courage and compassion, reverence and integrity. In changing times, we will support and must support the institutions that give our lives direction and purpose, our families, our schools, and our religious congregations. We stand for a culture of life in which every person matters and every being counts. We stand for marriage and family, which are the foundations of our society. We stand for the appointment of Federal judges who know the difference between personal opinion and the strict interpretation of the law.

My opponent takes a different approach. His words on these issues are a little murky, but his record is really clear. [Laughter] He says he supports the institution of marriage but voted against the Defense of Marriage Act, which overwhelmingly passed with Democrat and Republican votes. My predecessor signed that bill into law, which defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman, and my opponent voted against it. He says—you know, he says he's got a personal view on the issue of life, but he voted against the ban on the brutal practice of partial-birth abortion.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He's called the Reagan years a time of moral darkness.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. There is a mainstream in American politics, and my opponent sits on the far left bank. My fellow Americans, he can run from his views, but he cannot hide.

All the progress we hope for in America and all the prosperity and opportunity we want for every family and for our children ultimately depends on the security of our Nation. We're in the middle of a global war on terror. We face a determined enemy. In the war on terror, there's no place for confusion, no place for weakness, no substitute for victory. I believe if America shows uncertainty or weakness in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This will not happen on my watch.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Since that terrible morning of September the 11th, 2001, we fought the terrorists across the Earth, not for pride, not for power but because the lives of our citizens are at stake. Our strategy is clear. We're defending the homeland. We're strengthening our intelligence services. We're transforming our military. There will be no draft. The All-Volunteer Army will remain an all-volunteer army. We're on the offensive. We will strike the terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them here at home.

We're promoting democracy and liberty, the great alternatives to despair and terror. I want you to tell your children about what took place in Afghanistan. It wasn't all that long ago that young girls lived under the reign of the Taliban, a brutal, barbaric people. They would not let young girls go to school, and if their mothers didn't toe their ideological line, they were taken in the public square sometimes and whipped. These people were dark and dim. There was darkness in Afghanistan. Because we defended ourselves, because we believe in freedom, the Afghanistan people went by the millions to the polls to vote for their President. The first voter—the first voter—was a 19-year-old woman.

Iraq will have a Presidential election. Think how far that country has come from the days of torture chambers and mass graves. Freedom is on the march. Freedom is on the move, and our country is better for it.

A President must lead with consistency and strength in these troubling times. In war, sometimes you change your tactics, but you never change your principles. And Americans have seen how I do my job. [Applause] Thank you. Even when you might not agree with me, you know where I stand, what I believe, and what I intend to do. On good days and on bad days, whether the polls are up or the polls are down, I am determined to win this war

on terror, and I will always support the men and women of the United States military.

My opponent has taken a different approach. It's fair to say that consistency has not been his strong point. *[Laughter]* Senator Kerry says we're better off with Saddam Hussein out of power, except when he declared that removing Saddam made us less safe. He stated in our second debate that he always believed that Saddam was a threat except, a few questions later, when he said Saddam Hussein was not a threat. *[Laughter]* He says he was right when he voted to authorize the use of force against Saddam Hussein, but that I was wrong to use force against Saddam Hussein. *[Laughter]*

And now he's throwing out a wild claim that he knows where bin Laden was in the fall of 2001, and that our military passed up a chance to get him at Tora Bora. It is unjustified criticism of the military commanders in the field. It is the worst kind of Monday morning quarterbacking. Our commander in Afghanistan at the time was General Tommy Franks, and he wrote this about Tora Bora, he said, "The Senator's understanding of events does not square with reality." *[Laughter]* That's what the man who was there said. He says the American Special Forces were actively involved in the search for the terrorists in Tora Bora, and that intelligence reports at the time placed bin Laden in one of several countries. They didn't know whether he was here, there, or otherwise. In other words, they didn't have hard intelligence. Maybe my opponent has seen something we all haven't seen.

As a matter of fact, Senator Kerry, before he got into political difficulty and revised his views, he said this about Tora Bora on national TV, in the fall of 2001, he said, "I think we have been doing this pretty effectively, and we should continue to do it that way." At the time, the Senator said about Tora Bora, "I think we have been smart. I think the administration lead-

ership has done it well, and we are on the right track." All I can say about that is, I am George W. Bush, and I approve of that message.

My opponent's record on national security has a far deeper problem than election-year flip-flopping. On the largest national security issues of our time, he has been consistently wrong. When Ronald Reagan was confronting the Soviet Union at the height of the cold war, Senator Kerry said that President Reagan's policy of peace through strength was making America less safe. History has shown that Senator Kerry was wrong and President Ronald Reagan was right.

When former President Bush led a coalition against Saddam Hussein in 1991, Senator Kerry voted against the use of force to liberate Kuwait, even though the United Nations had passed a resolution and there was a strong coalition and agreement with U.S. policy. History has shown that Senator Kerry was wrong, former President Bush was right.

In 1994, just one year after the first bombing of the World Trade Center, my opponent proposed massive cuts in America's intelligence budget, so massive that even his Massachusetts colleague, Ted Kennedy, opposed them. History has shown that Senator Kerry was wrong—we've got to be fair—Senator Kennedy was right. *[Laughter]*

The President must be consistent and strong in these difficult times. Just last year, when American troops were in combat in Afghanistan and Iraq, I proposed \$87 billion of increased funding to support our troops in harm's way. It was important funding. Bipartisan support for that funding was very strong. As you round up the vote, I want you to remind your friends and neighbors of this startling statistic: Only 4 members of the United States Senate—4 out of 100—voted to authorize the use of force and then voted against funding for our troops in harm's way, and 2 of those 4 were my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. You might remember, when they asked him about the vote, he said this, he said, "I actually did vote for the \$87 billion, right before I voted against it." History has shown that Senator Kerry was right, then wrong, then briefly right, then wrong again. [Laughter] They finally kept pressing him. He said the whole thing about the \$87 billion was a complicated matter. My friends, there is nothing complicated about supporting our men and women in combat.

And speaking about those men and women, we have got a fantastic military and I'm proud to be their Commander in Chief. And I want to thank the military families who are here today for your sacrifice. And I want to thank the veterans who are here today for having set such a great example.

During the last 20 years, in key moments of challenge and decision for America, Senator Kerry has chosen a position of weakness and inaction. With that record, he stands in opposition not just to me but to the great tradition of the Democratic Party. The party of Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman and John Kennedy is rightly remembered for confidence and resolve in times of war and hours of crisis. Senator Kerry has turned his back on "pay any price" and "bear any burden." He's replaced those commitments with "wait and see" and "cut and run." Many Democrats in this country do not recognize their party anymore, and today I want to speak to every one of them: If you believe America should lead with strength and purpose and confidence and resolve, I'd be honored to have your support, and I'm asking for your vote.

Our differences on keeping the security of the country and protecting our families are vast. My opponent says that September the 11th did not change him much at all.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. And his policies make that clear. He says the war on terror is primarily a law enforcement and intelligence gathering operation. Well, my outlook was changed on September the 11th. I'll never forget going to the Ground Zero on September the 14th, 2001. There were workers in hardhats there yelling at the top of their lungs, "Whatever it takes." I'll never forget the sights and sounds. I'll never forget the person looking me straight in the eye and saying, "Do not let me down." Ever since that day, I wake up every morning trying to figure out how best to protect our country. I will never relent in defending America, whatever it takes.

When I traveled your State 4 years ago, I made a pledge that if I was elected, I would uphold the honor and the dignity of the office to which I had been elected. With your help, with your hard work, I will do so for 4 more years.

Thanks for coming. God bless. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:30 a.m. at the Onalaska Omni Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor James Bialecki of Onalaska, WI; Kristina Shelley, daughter of KnobGallery owner Joan Shelley; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; and Gen. Tommy R. Franks, USA (Ret.), former combatant commander, U.S. Central Command.

Remarks in a Discussion in Richland Center, Wisconsin
October 26, 2004

The President. Thank you all for being here. Laura and I are—we're glad you came, and we are glad we came. I'm here to give you some reasons why I think you ought to put me back into office. I'm here to talk about issues that matter to our future. We're going to have—we're going to do it a little interesting way today. I've asked some of your fellow citizens to come up and talk about how our policies have affected their lives. And this will perhaps give people a clear view of why I have made some of the decisions I have made.

Perhaps the most important reason why people ought to put me back into office is so that Laura will be the First Lady for 4 more years. I'm going to take my jacket off. Okay. Some of you all may relate to this. When I asked her to marry me—actually, we had gone—I don't know if you know this or not, but we were in seventh grade together in San Jacinto Junior High in Midland, Texas. We became re-acquainted—are you from Midland?

Audience member. Lubbock.

The President. Lubbock, Texas, 150 miles south of Midland. Anyway, thank you, welcome.

When we became reacquainted, she was a public school librarian. It's fitting we're in a school here, by the way. We want to thank the teachers who work in this school to help every child realize their dreams. Thank you.

She said, "Fine, I will marry you"—this is after I asked her, of course—"only if you make me one promise." I said, "What is the promise?" "Promise me I'll never have to give a political speech." [Laughter] I, of course, said, "Okay, you've got a deal." She didn't hold me to the promise, thankfully. She's giving a lot of speeches, and when she does, the American people see a warm and compassionate and great First Lady.

I want to thank our friend Tommy Thompson. I want to thank him for his service to our country, and I want to thank him for his friendship. Tommy has done a great job in Washington. You trained him well. [Laughter] He was a wonderful Governor of Wisconsin; I knew that when I was looking for a Cabinet Secretary. I gave him a tough assignment, and he's handled it brilliantly. And I want to thank you, Tommy, for your service. Appreciate you.

You know, Tommy and I went to Washington to get some things done, and one of the things we had to do was to make sure our seniors had quality health care. Medicine was changing; Medicare was not. For example, the Government would pay thousands of dollars for a heart surgery under Medicare but not one dime for the prescription drugs that could prevent the heart surgery from being needed in the first place. And Tommy and I understood that didn't make any sense for our seniors and it didn't make any sense for the taxpayers, so we worked together with both Republicans and Democrats to strengthen Medicare, to keep the promise to our seniors. And beginning in the year 2006, all seniors will be able to get prescription drug coverage under Medicare. I think it's important for you to know that when I say something, I mean it, and I'm going to get the job done.

I want to thank thank Congressman Mark Green. I appreciate you coming, Congressman, a fine young Congressman from Wisconsin. He's not from this part of the world, but you'll get to know him, and when you do, you'll like him. He's a good, honest man.

I want to thank Jack Voight for being here, the State treasurer of the great State of Wisconsin. Jack, thank you, sir. Good to see you again. And I want to thank the mayor. Madam Mayor, thanks for coming.